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THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONFLICT IN FINLAND.

BY A MEMBER OF THE FINNISH DIET.

DURING the last three months the "*coup d'état* in Finland" has formed a standing topic in practically the whole of the European press and in part of the American press. The people of Finland have not, hitherto, made much noise in the world, and, therefore, they have been comparatively little known in Europe and still less in other parts of the earth. Yet, the Finns are not altogether unknown in America, where the large majority of emigrants from Finland seek a livelihood or a new home.

Thus far, however, is the status of Finland known in all educated circles, that the country, which, up till 1809, formed a Swedish province, was then incorporated *with* Russia after a war in which Sweden was unsuccessful. Further, it is known that Finland was not incorporated *in* Russia, but that, at the Landtdag in Borga, to which the legal representatives of the country were called by the Czar, Alexander I., the country was assured of its right of retaining its ancient Constitutional Laws, which were identical with, and had formed part of, the old Swedish Constitution, with its free exercise of religion and all the other privileges enjoyed by every Swedish citizen. Alexander I. thus created out of Finland, the ancient Swedish province, a constitutional monarchical state, incorporated *with* Russia under its sovereignty.

The Russian autocracy was not extended to Finland, where, on the contrary, the power of the monarch, according to the constitution, the *Regerings Form* of 1772 and *Förenings* and *Säkerhets* Act of 1789, is limited by the right of the estates to take part in legislation and taxation. As regards the so-called economical, or administrative, legislation, the monarch has this to himself alone, although, in this department too, his powers are somewhat circumscribed. In order to rightly understand the nature of the con-

stitution of Finland, it may not be out of place to point to the section of the *Regerings Form* (Form of Government) which provides that the monarch may not make any new law nor unmake any old law without the knowledge and consent of the estates. It is further stipulated, in the *Förenings* and *Säkerhets* Act, that "whereas real liberty is only consistent with the free giving unto the country of whatever may be required for its maintenance, therefore the Finnish people have the incontestable right to deliberate, adjust, refuse and agree with the monarch about these things." And it is on this enactment that the right of legislation and taxation of the Finnish Landtdag is principally founded.

As regards the social status of Finland after 1809, this was arranged in accordance with the Swedish ideas which previously prevailed. A "Government Council," subsequently named the "Imperial Senate for Finland," was established to replace the authorities in the Swedish capital, provided for by the Constitutional Laws. The Senate consists of two departments, of which one has in its hands the management of civil affairs in general, while the other is the Supreme Court of the country. The Governor-General acts as president of the Senate, and he to a certain extent represents the person of the Czar and is the commander of the troops garrisoned in the country. The members of the Senate must be Finnish men, and the same stipulation applies to all functionaries and officials in the whole country.

During the long period between 1809 and 1863, the Landtdag was not called together, although the question had been mooted several times. It was the monarch's prerogative to decide the time for the calling in of the estates. Alexander II., the reviver of the constitutional rights of the state, summoned the estates in the year 1863 and ratified, in 1869, a new "*Landtdags Ordning*" for Finland. This mode of Government ordains that the Landtdag, or Parliament, shall meet at least every fifth year, in the capital of the country. Up till the present time, the Landtdag has, indeed, regularly met. Since 1883, this has taken place every third year.

The comparatively modest forms in which the constitutional life of Finland has been invested, have by no means been detrimental to a rapid and general development of the country's natural economical resources. Far from it. The lift given by the regular meetings of the National Assembly to the national life in

Finland in all its aspects must be described as simply astonishing. If anywhere, certain it is that in Finland you have had an opportunity of observing how a country, where legislation is adjusted to the characteristics of the people, their ideas and their wants, and where the management of administration, finances and the national defence are in the hands of the people themselves, will make progress, however disadvantageous may be the exterior relations under which it has to labor. True, it is required of such a people to have a warm patriotism, a persistency of purpose and a strong substratum of moral power; but scarcely anywhere have free institutions in a more glorious manner exhibited their true value than in Finland, situated north of the sixty-first degree of latitude.

Finland, although covered by lakes, marshes and forests, and exposed to a hard climate, exhibits a richly cultured life, with industry and agriculture in an advanced state of development, and an education that is both high and general. Untouched by the corruption of Russian officialism and the arbitrary changes in Russian legislation, Finland has hitherto been able to develop itself independently on national ground. Thus it has come about that this country has become a bearer of western culture even north of the polar circle, and thereby has deserved the attention and respect of the whole civilized world. The country, thanks to its Scandinavian culture, the loyalty of its inhabitants, and the faithfulness of farsighted sovereigns to their word, has been able not only to preserve, but even to further develop, its home autonomy. With an inflexible love did the Finnish people adhere to their sovereign dynasty, which, again, made it a matter of honor to inviolably stand by the assurance to Finland given by Alexander I. Even Nicolas I., who certainly was anything but a friend of a constitutional mode of government, did not allow his Russian ministers to mix themselves up in the affairs of the country. "Finland governs itself"—such was his reply to any attempt at such interference.

But Finland's position in the Russian realm, however advantageous it may have appeared, was threatened by serious dangers. The greatest lay in the disparity in power between the Grand Duchy, with its two and one-half million inhabitants, and the Empire with its one hundred and thirty millions. The Russian national feeling, led in Chauvinistic direction, would scarcely

reconcile itself with the flourishing state of a constitutional country, where nothing was Russian, while the despotically governed Russia itself, sucked out by a rapacious bureaucracy and oppressed by an insensate system of taxation, sank deeper and deeper in poverty and ignorance. The question then became important, whether the common monarch was possessed of sufficient power of character and authority to be able, in the long run, to oppose the shouts of the Panslavistic press urging the incorporation of Finland in the Empire by the destruction of its independence as a State and nation.

Alexander III., who himself was not unaffected by the ultra Panslavistic idea, had caused a programme for Finland to be drawn up, implying community in postal and monetary customs and military matters between the Empire and the Grand Duchy. Of this programme only the first point was brought into effect. The administration of the Finnish postal affairs was put into the hands of the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs. This was a violation of the Finnish Constitution. But here stopped the community reforms during the reign of Alexander III.

When his son and successor, Nicolas II., at the age of a little more than twenty, ascended the throne, hopes were cherished, both in Russia and in Finland, of a period of freer development. But soon, alas, it was to be proved that those hopes had been vain. A pupil of the procurator in the Holy Synod, Pobjedonostjeff, the reaction incarnate, and feeble of character, the young monarch was soon to become a plaything of his reactionary surroundings. It had been made clear to him that his duties toward Russia included the realization of his father's will, the preservation of autocracy and the assimilation of the foreign nationalities in the realm with the Russian. Those around him understood how to keep the Czar unaware of the fact that behind the phrase, "one Russia with one faith, one autocrat and one tongue," was concealed the egotism and covetousness of power of a corrupt officialdom. Their aim was to divert his attention from the destitution, lawlessness and the crying abuses prevailing in the interior, and fix it instead on matters outside of Russia itself. When the foreign policy no longer offered any sufficient grounds for so doing, Finland was singled out as a proper object of attention—Finland, whose free constitution could not possibly remain consistent with the interests, dignity and glory of the Czardom.

The first object of aggression against Finland's autonomy was its independent military system. Finland possessed from 1809 a national army, the so-called *Indelningsverket*, or soldier farmer system, as it had been inherited from the times of Swedish rule, in virtue of which system every owner of landed property in each territorial sub-division keeps a soldier of either infantry or cavalry. In the year 1878, the estates adopted a Compulsory Service Act for Finland. In virtue of this, every Finnish citizen is liable to conscription for the defence of throne and Fatherland. The age of conscription is 21 years, and the lot decides which are to enter active service; the remainder are transferred to the reserve forces. The shortest term of service in the active army, which amounts to 5,600 men, is three years, which time, however, can be shortened for those having a higher degree of education. Those transferred to the reserve forces are subjected to ninety days' drill. The Finnish troops have their stations within the country and are commanded by Finnish officers. The Russian Minister of War reports upon and submits to the Czar such purely military questions as have reference to the Finnish troops. All other matters are submitted by the "Minister of State for Finland." Up till the present time, Finland has paid annually in military expenses about nine million marks. It may, besides, be mentioned that, according to the Compulsory Service Act for Finland, its more important decrees are of the nature of Constitutional Law. They must, therefore, not be altered or annulled without the consent of all four estates at the Landtdag.

II.

The foregoing explanation has been necessary to make the situation clear to the reader. With complete surprise was the news received in Finland, in the summer of last year, of the summoning of an extraordinary session of the Landtdag for the enactment of a reform of the Finnish Compulsory Service Act. It was the Russian Minister of War, Kuropatkin—a man actively antagonistic to Finland—who desired such a hurried treatment of the matter. He had succeeded in gaining the ear of the Czar and had thus induced him to sign the Decree calling the Landtdag to meet in 1899, in spite of the fact that the ordinary Landtdag was timed to meet in the year 1900.

In virtue of Finland's constitution, all Finnish affairs, which

are to be considered by the Landtdag, must have previously been prepared by Finnish authorities, the highest being the Senate for Finland. All business pertaining to this question of conscription reform, however, had been prepared by the Council at St. Petersburg, in which the number of the Finnish members was infinitely small, as compared with the number of Russians. No heed whatever was paid to their objections. The proposals which were presented to the Landtdag, after even the Senate's propositions had been disallowed, contain what is practically a literal copy of the Russian Conscription Act. The Finnish conscription would, according to these, be extended to the defence of the Czarism, as the holy duty of every Russian subject. The term of service was to be five years in the active and thirteen in the reserve forces. Russian officers were to enter the Finnish troops. The military matters of Finland were, in the future, to be managed exclusively by the Russian Government and Russian authorities. Finally, it was hinted that part of the Finnish conscriptive youth was to be passed into the Russian troops stationed in Finland or on its borders.

What most hurt the Finnish national feeling was, however, the contents of the minutes of the committee, which, as appendices, were brought along with the proposals of conscription and had been prepared by Russian staff officers. The tone of these documents was similar to the polemical aggressiveness of the worst Russian Slavophile papers. Their right to have a Fatherland of their own; to remain separate, free Finnish citizens; to preserve their separate constitution and an independent national development,—these rights were completely refused to the Finns. There is no longer any mention of the Grand Duchy of Finland, but only of the Finnish Læns, or districts. By a lying representation, showing, moreover, as much frivolousness as ignorance, it is sought to put a wrong construction upon confirmation of Finland's political laws granted by Alexander I. It is, finally, unmistakably intimated that these reforms in Finland's military system are desired because the fidelity of the Finnish people toward monarch and realm are suspected.

When the Landtdag met, in the end of January, the position of the country was darker than ever. The estates had to consider under the pressure of a powerful opinion in the Empire, a law by which it was intended to affect a complete assimilation of the

Finnish and Russian army systems. The confidence of the monarch in his country had been disturbed, and, as Governor General, Adjutant General Bobrikoff had been entrusted with the supreme direction of affairs in Finland, with the additional mandate of carrying out the amalgamation programme. General Bobrikoff, who, being a *parvenu*, owes his career to Grand Duke Wladimir's favor, besides his own working abilities, was the man who was to lend himself as a tool for the Russification of Finland. Long had they been looking about for somebody who, after Count Heyden's demission, would be willing to be made use of for so contemptible a task. When Bobrikoff, at last, was chosen—the man had already won his laurels in the very same sort of business in the Baltic provinces—the Grand Duke is said to have exclaimed: "He will do it!" To what extent Bobrikoff will succeed in carrying out the programme entrusted to him, the future will show. In Finland, he has made himself thoroughly hated, by the mendacity and brutality of his character, by his press persecutions, and particularly by the part he took in the issue of the manifesto of February concerning the new rules of legislation. That he has found there land and people essentially different to what he had thought, and that he has by this time found out that his mission is more difficult than he had imagined, of this there is not the slightest doubt.

The estates of Finland had scarcely had time to commence their labors, when they were surprised in February by the Imperial Manifesto and Fundamental Decrees concerning the preparation, examination and promulgation of laws issued in respect of the Empire, including the Grand Duchy of Finland. Bobrikoff's part in the issue of this document, by which he, according to his own saying, would "bind the Finnish dogs," has been already alluded to. A worse blow has not fallen on Finland since it became united with Russia ninety years ago. For by it Finland's constitution was cut to pieces, and the Russian Autocracy was extended out over Finland's soil as well.

According to Finland's constitution, confirmed by all its monarchs, no other business of the Grand Duchy than matters of foreign politics can be excluded from its control. Now, however, the monarch has issued a law, by which he has reserved unto himself the right to declare as a matter of common interest to the realm whatever question he may choose. After he has decided this, the estates and Senate of Finland are heard, upon which the question

is passed on to the Russian Council of the Empire, and is finally decided upon by the Emperor himself. Thus, the Emperor can now declare questions—belonging even to the sphere of civil and criminal legislation, the law on conscription, and so forth—to be imperial business. They are then resolved by him personally, and the Finnish Landtdag has been converted from a legislative into a merely advisory assembly. True, matters pertaining to “the local administration,” as it is called, will continue to be handed over to the decision of the estates. But the question as to what these matters are is no longer dependent upon the Constitution, but upon the imperial fancy.

Instead of using the co-operation of the Landtdag in passing a law determining the matters which might partake of the nature of imperial affairs, the advisers of the Emperor have persuaded him that he has committed no breach of the Constitution by using his autocratic power in issuing the decrees in question. And Nicolas II. has been weak enough to let himself be induced to violate Finland’s Constitution, and to open up a constitutional conflict with a people who for ninety years faithfully stood on the side of Russia and never gave its monarchs any occasion for trouble whatsoever.

The effect of the imperial manifesto upon the population of Finland was crushing. There was, however, a hope that the Senate might not promulgate it in the Official Gazette, but submit to the Emperor a representation of the illegality in the creation of that document. The members of the Landtdag and private citizens had communicated their opinion to that effect to the members of the Senate. But, alas, the Senate yielded at the last critical moment under the pressure of Bobrikoff’s menaces. With ten votes against ten, the president’s vote being decisive, the Senate resolved to promulgate the manifesto, and only thereafter present to the Emperor a memorial on its illegality. The minds of the whole nation were filled with resentment and grief. The Landtdag endorsed a report of its legal committee to the effect that the manifesto, having been illegally created, could not be sanctioned by law in Finland. Moreover, the estates instructed the Landtmarshall and their three other presidents to go to St. Petersburg in order to personally express to the Emperor the opinion that the manifesto was illegal and to solicit its retraction. On Bobrikoff’s instigation, the presidents of the four estates

were refused an audience, and the same fate befell a deputation from the Senate who had brought a memorial of protest to the Emperor. But the memorial, which was a sharp one and excellently written, was subsequently read to the Emperor by the State Secretary for Finland and is said to have made a deep impression upon the Czar. He said that it had never been his intention to violate the affirmation which he made on his accession. Was this merely talk, or is it possible that Nicolas II. had been really so misguided that he was unable to judge what his action really meant?

However, a last remedy would yet have to be tried. Citizens of the capital sent an appeal to the country, and, within ten days, more than five hundred thousand signatures were obtained under an address to the Emperor in which the people demanded the retraction of the manifesto. The fifth part of the whole population of the country had during this short time hastened to give vent to an expression of opinion, an occurrence which certainly may be called unique in the history of the world. The address was taken to St. Petersburg by a deputation of five hundred peasants and gentlemen. Nor were these received by the Emperor, who, however, declared that he was not wroth with the deputation. They were requested to submit the address through the Governor General.

The reverses that had thus been met with by the Finnish people in their attempts to regain their rights, could but naturally depress and embitter their minds. All ladies in the country are now wearing mourning dresses. As another mode of demonstration, magnificent floral homages have been paid to the monument of Alexander II., the reviver of Finland's constitutional liberties.

Meanwhile, the session of the Landtdag has been uninterruptedly going on. In the beginning of May, the estates received two more propositions from St. Petersburg. One of these contained the proposal that out of the Finnish yearly contingent of 7,200 conscripts only about 2,000 were to remain in the service of the country, while the remainder were to serve in Russia. In the other, it was proposed that ten million marks shall every year be transferred from the treasury of Finland to that of Russia for military purposes.

To none of these proposals would the Landtdag consent. The transfer of Finnish conscripts to Russian troops would be a fatal

blow to Finland, since such a measure would effect a wholesale emigration of its strongest inhabitants. Impossible, likewise would it be for Finland to pay annually, out of a budget of sixty million marks, twenty millions for military purposes. The country, poor in itself, would by so doing become destitute.

On the 30th of May, the Landtdag was brought to a close by a speech from the throne. In the memorials which have been prepared by its Law and Conscript Committee and endorsed unanimously by the estates, the Russian aggressions are strongly refuted, and the foundations of Finland's sworn rights are eloquently set forth. The Landtdag has only in certain parts remodelled the military law now in force, but in so doing it has also made such concessions as have been possible of realization. The Finnish troops will, according to this modified law, be transportable beyond the frontiers of Finland, whenever the defence of the realm so demands. Instead of 6,000 men, the Landtdag has consented to provide 12,000 active soldiers, besides which is proposed the abolishment of the reserve militia, to which forces Russia always has been averse. Otherwise everything will be essentially unchanged as in the Finnish Military law of 1878.

As to the troubles and desires of the country, the Landtmarschall and other presidents of the estates gave equally strong and eloquent expressions at the closing of the session. Will Nicolas II. listen to the voice of the Finnish people, or will he continue to give his ears to his Russian advisers? The latter is, unfortunately, to be apprehended. The constitutional conflict will then be continued. For the Finns are known not only for their patriotism and obedience to the law, but also to be one of the most persevering nations in the world. Their institutions and wealth may be destroyed, but Russianized the Finns will never be. Their nation forms an individuality of its own, having its distinct historical mission. To the world at large, this struggle between the Russian giant and little Finland, the extreme outpost of culture in the North, will be a spectacle of the greatest interest. On which side the sympathy of the world lies, of that Finland has already received the most eloquent testimonials.